

Columbia City SDA Church

March 24, 2020

"Stress Tested"

Dear Little Flock (Luke 12:32):

This coming Sabbath will mark two consecutive weeks when we will not be worshipping as a church family. If the COVID -19 crisis persists, this time might be extended. Right now everything is in flux, so let's be patient and be prayerful.

The curtailment of worship has nothing to do with our freedom to worship. These measures were put in place by the government and recommended by our church leaders out of an abundance of caution, in order to restrict and control a virus of pandemic proportion. This menace has drastically altered our lives and wreaked havoc on society. So during this time of uncertainty we need to be calm, reflective and support each other in prayer. Cooperate with the advice and laws formulated by the different levels of our government. Don't try to be a martyr. Don't needlessly endanger your life and the lives of others. We are the children of light (1 Thess 5:5). Be wise!

Consider this: arguably, the two most powerful parables Christ told are found in Matthew 7:24-ff; 25:1-ff. At the very core of each parable is one of character building and preparedness. What is striking about both parables is that they were **stress tested**. In the case of the two houses that were built (Matt 7), it took a vehement storm to reveal a structural flaw in the construction of the building. With respect to the virgins (Matthew 25) there was uniformity among all ten, until the call was given at midnight that the bridegroom had arrived; *go ye out to meet him* (verse 6). If the bridegroom had come at midday, all virgins would have gone out to greet him with no difficulty. But the fact that the guest of honor came at midnight, the five virgins with no oil in their lamps could not navigate their way in the dark. The stress factor was the darkness of the night.

COVID – 19 is a stress test. The imposition of regulations and restrictions; the control of travel and the suspension of the right to worship put a stress on life as we knew it before the emergence of this virus. What did it reveal in your character and your relationship with God? How did you observe the Sabbath when you couldn't meet for corporate worship in a church? Was your prayer life enhanced or diminished? Did you show a preference for a

wholesome diet or in the absence of certain foods you abandon healthy eating habits? Did you face the challenges the virus posed or did your faith and trust in God wane? In brief, when COVID -19 took you in a far country, did you eat from the pig's trough or did you, like the three Hebrew boys, rely on God, regardless of the circumstances?

Challenging times are intended, not so much to **develop** our character but to **reveal** the caliber of the character. Inspiration tells us: *The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts.* {SC 57.2}

There can be no doubt whatsoever that this virus has caused panic and fear in the lives of many of our fellow citizens, and rightly so. But we cannot allow our fears to undermine or replace our faith in God. There are too many wonderful promises in the Bible for us to dwell on. It is for such a time like this that God has been working on us – strengthening our faith through His word, shoring up our confidence by our prayers for one another, and perfecting our character through adversity. This is part of the test for which we have been preparing. The servant of the Lord cogently writes: *The season of distress and anguish before us will require a faith that can endure weariness, delay, and hunger—a faith that will not faint though severely tried* (GC 621). Let us prove to the universe that we are up to the task. *If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small* (Proverbs 24:10).

Please take note of the following:

1. **Our church will remain closed until further notice. You will be informed ahead of the resumption of regular services**
2. **Over 6000 lives were lost in Italy. Practice social distancing by staying home.**
3. **If you are, or know of any member experiencing undue hardship caused by COVID – 19, please call me at (386 466-4455).**
4. **The Quarterlies have arrived and will be distributed when the crisis is over. However the Sabbath School Lessons are available on line just by goggling: SDA Quarterly. If you do not have access to a computer, let me know and I will try and facilitate your getting a copy of the Quarterlies.**
5. **I have compiled an exercise you and your family can use for Sabbath worship. Basically it reminds us of some of the promises and assurances God has given us in His word for situations similar to what we are going through. Let me know if you need a copy. Oh, did I tell you it's FREE?**

Don't throw up your hands in despair. Kneel in submission!!